

CREATURES OF THE BENEATH WORLD: HOPEWELL EFFIGIES FROM TURNER MOUND

PART 2: THE WATER BEAST AND FISH/SNAKE EFFIGIES

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The past issue of *Ohio Archaeologist* discussed the horned monster effigy found in Mound 4 of the Turner Works of Hamilton County. Turner was excavated mostly by Frederick Ward Putnam, Charles Metz and M. H. Saville between 1882 and 1891. Artifacts unearthed there are now in the collection of the Peabody Museum at Harvard University. Notes on the excavation and artifacts were reported in Charles Willoughby's 1922 book *Turner Mound Group of Earthworks Hamilton County, Ohio*.

Two other curious and unique effigies that depict monster-like creatures were also found in Mound 4, and are subjects of the second half of this report. It will include a discussion of the objects themselves, comparisons with similar objects, and biological traits. Additionally, discussing the two effigies in the context of how the Hopewell viewed the cosmos adds to the understanding of how the Hopewell might have envisioned inhabitants of the beneath world—and perhaps providing a glimpse of the Hopewell culture itself.

Water Beast

Equally as large as the horned effigy (more than 10 inches in length)—and nearly as curious in carved detail—a second monster-like effigy was also found in Mound 4 of Turner. Described as a “water beast” in the museum catalog, and also found in fragments, this second effigy is pictured in figures 1 to 4. According to the Museum notes, the piece measures 27.6 cm (10.75 inches) in length and 8.5 cm (3.25 inches) in width, and 3.7 cm (1.25 inches) in height.

The Museum notes simply state that the material it was made from is “stone,” but Willoughby describes the stone in detail, noting that the “material is reddish-brown mica-schist thickly interspersed with particles of gold-colored mica,” and he notes that such effigies are “usually made of choice varieties of stone.”

In his 1922 report, Willoughby describes this second large effigy by emphasizing its carved crosshatched patterns and large bored eyes:

The second hollow object from this altar of the same general class [as the horned effigy]... Instead of being carved in relief, the animal is represented by the usual lines and cross-hatching seen in the incised carvings upon bone and antler. ...The drawing

is so conventionalized, we can only guess as to what animal it represents. The eye cavities have an unfinished appearance, and it is probable that pearls were inserted in them. (p. 70)

As can be seen in the photographs, the effigy has an elliptical outline. There are also detailed markings inscribed on the upper side that appear to depict eyes, a snout-like head, four curved appendages, body or scale patterns along the side and back which terminate into narrow markings depicting a tail.

Photographs and a black line drawing of the effigy in Willoughby's 1922 report are shown in figures 5 and 6. As noted, the object is similar in size and general configuration to the horned monster. Willoughby classifies the two artifacts as “hollow effigies.” He comments:

These two effigies belong to a group of hollow objects from the mounds, the use of which is unknown. They are usually made of choice varieties of stone, but sometimes of antler or other material. They are carved into many shapes, but the more elaborate examples are representations of the upper portion of a bird or quadruped or the head of some animal. One specimen in the museum collection is in the form of a large beetle. All of them have a cavity upon the underside, and seem to have been fitted over some object. Some have perforations through the top, evidently for attachment. (70-71)

This hollow shape of the effigy lends itself to comparison with boatstones, which have been found on woodland sites in many parts of Ohio. However, at nearly 10 inches in length, it is considerably larger than most boatstones, which typically measure only 4 inches in length, as described by Robert Converse in *Ohio Slate Types*. This comparatively larger size of both this effigy and the horned monster may suggest something of how the Hopewell viewed the creature being depicted perhaps with qualities of power, strength or importance.

Additionally, some of the copper boats and cones found at Turner were filled with pebbles (figure 7). Like copper boats and cones, it is conceivable that this and other hollow effigies may have been filled with pebbles and the underside covered to contain them. In this way, the effigy may have made a rattling

noise when shaken, a noise which could have been part of some ceremony.

In an attempt to identify what animal might be depicted in the effigy, photographs of the effigies were shared with biologists Pete Mohan and Wendy Buck of the Akron Zoological Park, which has a large collection of North American animals. The two biologists suggested that this piece bore a resemblance to an alligator gar.

The alligator gar is a primitive-looking predatory fish with a snout-like head and fearsome-looking teeth that give it a resemblance to its namesake. Alligator gars inhabit the Mississippi and Ohio River systems, and are sometimes found in the Scioto and other rivers in southern Ohio. They are known to grow to 7 or more feet in length and more than 200 pounds in weight. Wikipedia reports the North American record of a 279 pound specimen caught by rod and reel.

In the 1922 report, Willoughby states of the carving on the effigy that it is “so conventionalized we can only guess as to what animal it represents.” While the cross-hatched carvings are somewhat stylized, a close study of photographs of large alligator gar specimens makes a reasonable case for an alligator gar as the creature represented by the effigy.

The specimen photographs highlight shapes and body features that correspond to some of the carved details on the effigy. First, the overall outline of the effigy has an appearance resembling a large fish hovering in deep water as viewed from above, perhaps of several fish species. Figure 9 shows an alligator gar in such a position. The alligator gar in this particular photograph has a similar overall elongated elliptical body outline. Second, the four carved appendages on the side of the effigy resemble the rounded side fins of the alligator gar in shape. In addition, the carved appendages correspond in their approximate position along the side of the body. While the diamond banding patterns across the back of the effigy are abstract, the patterns may be intended to suggest the large diamond shaped scales along the back of the gar.

A large alligator gar specimen is shown in Figure 10. Details of the long flat snout areas with its raised ridges of its bony plate can be seen. These raised snout features correspond to the carved crosshatchings on the front or “snout” of the effigy in its central placement and broad shape. Ad-



Figures 1-2 (Rusnak) Top and underside of carved effigy. (Copyright - Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology 82-35210/299684)



Figures 3-4 (Rusnak) Two detail views of the carved effigy. (Copyright - Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology 82-35-210/299684)

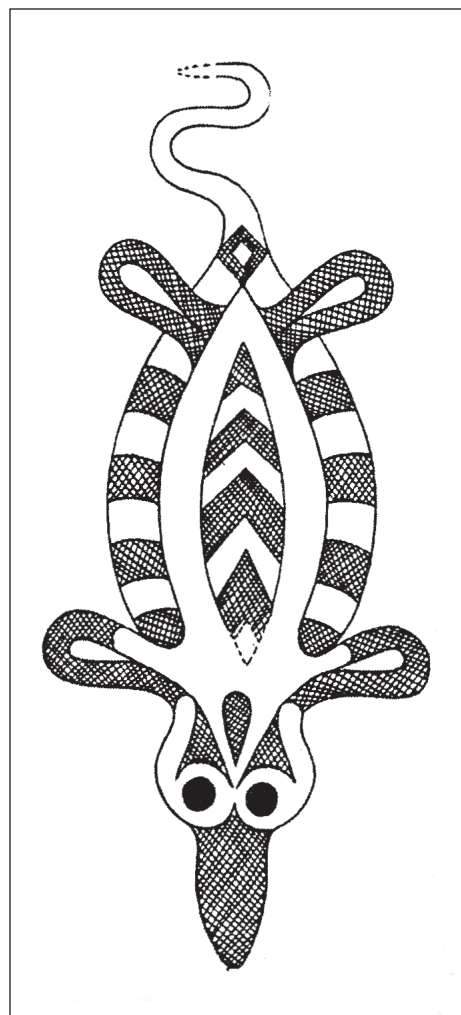


Figure 5 (Rusnak) Line drawing of carving of effigy (from Willoughby)

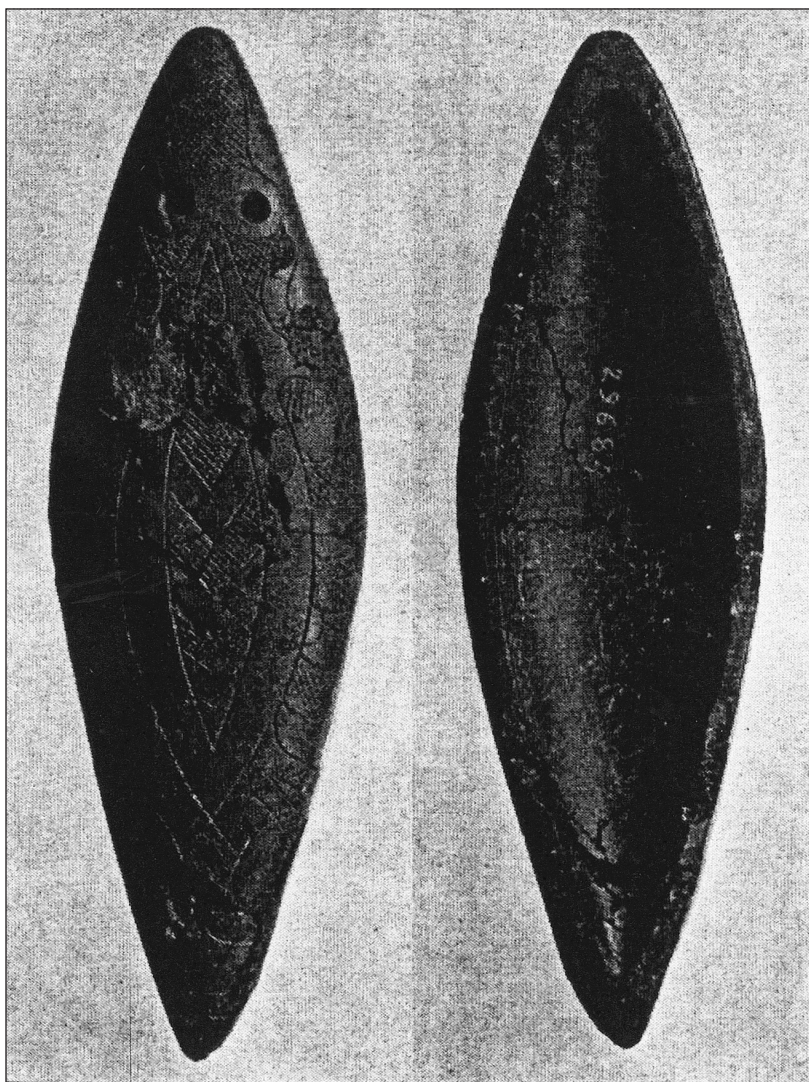


Figure 6 (Rusnak) Photos from Willoughby 1922 report on Turner Mound.



Figure 7 (Rusnak) Copper boatstone from Turner Group.

Figures 8-9 (Rusnak) The Hopewell may have had the alligator gar in mind when they carved this effigy. Note the similarities on the snout markings, side fins, scale patterns and overall outline of this large, predatory fish found in the Mississippi and Ohio River systems.



Photo credit figure 8 (Copyright - Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology 82-35-10/29684)



Photo credit figure 9 - Tanya Dewey - Animal Diversity Web

ditionally, there appears to be a similarity between the curving outline of the cross-hatched area and that of the gar's bony plate—both in front of the eyes where it curves slightly inward and above the mouth where it tapers to a rounded point. Figure 12 shows another large specimen. These same raised snout features can be seen. Plus, half-moon shaped hollow areas are clearly visible behind the eyes of the fish in this photograph. Similar shapes appear to be depicted in the rounded funnel-shaped crosshatching designs directly behind the drilled eyes of the effigy.

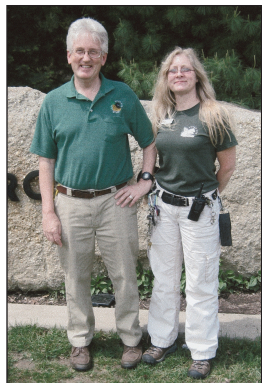
In short, such details make a case for the alligator gar as the creature depicted in this large Hopewell effigy from Turner. Such a powerful fish—extraordinary in size and in its fearsome alligator-like teeth—would certainly have made it a worthy companion to the powerful horned serpent.

Curiously, if the effigy does represent an alligator gar, the animal itself has the appearance of a creature with mixed features. Its reptilian-like head on a fish body seems strangely consistent with the mixed animal features found in the other two effigies.

Fish Monster

Figures 13 to 15 show photographs of a third, much smaller effigy found in Mound 4 at Turner, representing a creature with both serpentine and fish features. Museum notes state that this smaller effigy measures 9.3 cm. (3⁵/₈ inches) in length and 2.2 cm (7/8 inch) in width, and 2 cm. (3/4 inch) in height, and that it was made of either bone or antler.

The head and the underside of the throat resemble many types of freshwater fish, while the tail is that of a rattlesnake. The Akron biologists observed that the semi-circular inscribed markings on the side of the effigy suggest gills, and that the holes on the side and on the top of the effigy are in positions where fins would be expected. The position of the holes suggests that it may have had some attachment made to look like fins. The biologist also noted that in addition to the rattle, the underside of the effigy bore the parallel lines like those of the underside of any snake. This effigy, while smaller, suggests a creature with more power than your average small fish, likely a creature to be respected.



Figures 9-A (Rusnak)
Pete Mohan and Wendy Buck of the Akron Zoological Park offered several observations of animal details in the three effigies from Turner.

The Hopewell Cosmos

To understand how the Hopewell might have known these effigies, it is helpful to have some familiarity with how they viewed the cosmos. As discussed in detail in Part 1 of this report, the Hopewell, as well as many Native American cultures, viewed the cosmos in layers. One layer was the ground from horizon to horizon where humans, trees and many animals live. Another layer is an above realm of the sky where birds can venture. There is also the beneath layer that is entered through lakes, rivers and other waterways. This realm is where some powerful creatures, such as the Horned Serpent, reside.

Conclusion

In the context of this view of the cosmos, the larger effigy with its smooth, elliptical outline, the fin-like appendages, appears to be a large fish, and a creature of the beneath world. Moreover, its relatively larger size, combined with carved features that may mimic those of a predatory fish like the alligator gar, suggests that the effigy depicts a powerful creature—one both fearful and worthy of admiration. Likewise, the aquatic features of the smaller effigy in combination with its rattlesnake parts suggest that it too is a creature of the beneath world, having something of its own powerful, but smaller, features.

Such creatures represented in the effigies of the horned monster, the water beast and the smaller zoomorphic perhaps provide a glimpse of the type of beliefs and stories that could have been readily recognized by members of the Hopewell culture in Ohio.

Much thanks to the people at the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard for allowing me to photograph these fascinating artifacts and for permitting us to share and publish them in *Ohio Archaeologist*. Thank you also to the Akron Zoological Park and to Adam Rusnak, my son, for his assistance with this report and the previous reports in *Ohio Archaeologist* on Ohio effigies, pipes and other artifacts in major museums.

Note on Folklore in the Southeast Ceremonial Complex

Where there were some curious similarities between the horned effigy and the Uketena described in James Mooney's *History, Myths, and Sacred Formulas of the Cherokee*, the stories Mooney recorded contain little mythology on fish. Mooney notes that "Although the Cherokee country abounds in swift-flowing streams well stocked with fish, of which the Indians make free use there is but little fish lore" (307). He did record a few fish myths. One concerns a large monster fish called "Dakwa" who swallows a man whole, and another story contains a giant lizard which is a transformed fish, called the "gigatsuhali," which makes the noise of a cicada and puffs its throat and turns red. How-

ever, there are no details in Mooney that would suggest any connections with these effigies.

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Figures 10-12 (Rusnak)

Photographs of large alligator gar specimens compared to Turner Mound effigy. The elongated and slightly curved cross hatch area on the front of the effigy correspond in shape to the raised ridges on the snout of the gar. Also, note the position of the side fins, and hollow areas near the eyes compared to similar carved markings behind the eyes of the effigy.

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Figures 13 thru 15 (Rusnak)

Three views of carved effigy from Turner with both fish and rattlesnake features.

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